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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 004570

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE: LEVIN; DRL/IRF: HEWETT; EUR/CACEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2013

TAGS: [GG](#) [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: VATICAN MIFFED, REALISTIC ABOUT GEORGIAN ABOUT
FACE ON BILATERAL AGREEMENT

REF: A. TBILISI 2196

[1](#)B. TBILISI 2111

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM D. BRENT HARDT FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) VATICAN AUTHORITIES WERE SURPRISED AND DISAPPOINTED WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA'S DECISION NOT TO SIGN AN INTERSTATE AGREEMENT THAT HAD BEEN NEGOTIATED WITH THE HOLY SEE. FOREIGN MINISTER JEAN LOUIS TAURAN HAD UNUSUALLY STRONG WORDS IN THE MEDIA AS HE CONCLUDED HIS FRUITLESS VISIT TO GEORGIA, DESCRIBING THE DECISION AS A "GRIEVOUS OFFENSE." VATICAN OFFICIALS TOLD EMBASSY THE AGREEMENT PROVIDED NOTHING MORE THAN A GUARANTEE OF LEGAL STATUS TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN GEORGIA AND DID NOT REPRESENT A THREAT TO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH. THOUGH OUR INTERLOCUTORS BLAMED THE ORTHODOX CHURCH FOR INSTIGATING THE GOG'S ABOUT FACE, THEY WERE REALISTIC ABOUT THE MYRIAD PRESSURES THE ORTHODOX AND GOG FACED, AND SAID THEY DID NOT EXPECT THE INCIDENT TO REVERBERATE TO THE WIDER DETRIMENT OF CATHOLIC-ORTHODOX RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

FM TAURAN LASHES OUT AT GOG

[1](#)2. (SBU) VATICAN AUTHORITIES WERE MIFFED OVER THE GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA'S SURPRISE DECISION LAST MONTH NOT TO SIGN AN INTERSTATE AGREEMENT THAT HAD BEEN NEGOTIATED WITH THE HOLY SEE (REFTELS) AND HAD BEEN SLATED TO BE SIGNED DURING THE VISIT OF HOLY SEE FOREIGN MINISTER ARCHBISHOP (SOON-TO-BE-CARDINAL) JEAN LOUIS TAURAN TO TBILISI SEPTEMBER 18-20. TAURAN TOLD THE PRESS TERSELY THAT THE "LAST-MINUTE RETHINK ON THE PART OF THE GEORGIAN AUTHORITIES" WAS A SLAP IN THE FACE FOR CATHOLICS IN GEORGIA, AND DECRIED THE LACK OF LEGAL RIGHTS FOR THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY. THE NORMALLY MEASURED TAURAN REFERRED TO THE DECISION AS A "GRIEVOUS OFFENSE" AND ACCUSED THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF A MISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN ON THE ISSUE, DESPITE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S WILLINGNESS TO SHARE INFORMATION ON THE GOVERNMENT TALKS. WHEN TAURAN WENT ON TO SAY THE INCIDENT WOULD "CAUSE GREAT SUFFERING" TO THE AILING POPE JOHN PAUL II, WHO HAD CHAMPIONED CATHOLIC-ORTHODOX RECONCILIATION IN A 1999 VISIT TO GEORGIA, HE WAS HITTING THE GEORGIANS WITH BOTH BARRELS.

HOLY SEE: NO PLAN FOR PRIMACY, PROSELYTISM IN GEORGIA

[1](#)3. (C) WHEN THE SMOKE HAD CLEARED SOMEWHAT, OUR VATICAN CONTACTS OFFERED A LESS STRIDENT ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION. JOZEF MAJ OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF CHRISTIAN UNITY, AND HOLY SEE OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR GEORGIA JULIO MURAT BOTH REFUTED THE CHARGE OF GEORGIAN NATIONALIST GURAM SHARADZE AND OTHERS THAT THE VATICAN HAD CONDUCTED SECRET NEGOTIATIONS TO "MAKE CATHOLICISM A STATE RELIGION." MURAT SAID THERE HAD BEEN "CONVERSATIONS" BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH REGARDING THE ACCORD,

AND THE CHURCH HAD BEEN WORKING WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO GUARD AGAINST OFFENDING THE ORTHODOX CHURCH. THERE WAS NO THOUGHT OF TRYING TO GAIN PRIMACY FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN GEORGIA -- ONLY TO GUARANTEE ITS RIGHTS, HE SAID. THOUGH SOME GEORGIAN ORTHODOX MAY FEEL A PSYCHOLOGICAL THREAT, THE HOLY SEE INSISTED THERE WAS NOTHING FOR THE ORTHODOX TO FEAR LEGALLY. FURTHER, MAJ CONTINUED, THE CHURCH HAD NO GRAND PLANS FOR PROSELYTISM IN GEORGIA.

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ENCOUNTERING
PRESSURE FROM EXTREMISTS, HOWEVER, THEY CHANGED THEIR MIND.
IN THE VIEW OF OUR
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RUMORS THAT THE
ORTHODOX CHURCH HAD PAID DEMONSTRATORS TO AGITATE AGAINST THE
AGREEMENT.

HOLY SEE REALISTIC ABOUT GEORGIAN PRESSURES

15. (C) MURAT WAS REALISTIC AND, TO SOME EXTENT, UNDERSTANDING
ABOUT THE FLAP.
HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE CHALLENGES AND CHANGE GEORGIAN SOCIETY
HAD EXPERIENCED IN
RECENT YEARS, SAYING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAD TO "UNDERSTAND
AND APPRECIATE
THEIR NEED TO DEFEND THEIR CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN THIS
CLIMATE OF CHANGE."
HE ALSO RECOGNIZED THE DIFFICULT BALANCING ACT PRESIDENT
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COMMENT: WHAT'S NEXT?

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SHEVARDNADZE IN THE PRESS ON THE SUBJECT NOTWITHSTANDING, MAJ
DOES NOT
EXPECT TO SEE THIS LAW ANY TIME SOON IN LIGHT OF THIS RECENT
CONTROVERSY.

17. (C) AS FOR THE FLAP'S GENERAL EFFECT ON WIDER
ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC RELATIONS,
OUR VATICAN SOURCES ARE SEEKING TO PREVENT IT FROM
REVERBERATING MUCH BEYOND ITS
IMMEDIATE CONTEXT. THERE IS RECOGNITION IN THE VATICAN THAT
THE FACTORS THAT
HELPED CREATE THIS CHALLENGE TO ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC RELATIONS
ARE IN FACT
SPECIFIC TO GEORGIA -- THE INFLUENCE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX
CHURCH IN
THE COUNTRY, POLITICAL COMPLICATIONS CAUSED BY SEPARATIST
ABKHAZIA, AND THE
COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE
ORTHODOX CHURCH.
NEVERTHELESS, THE INCIDENT REINFORCES THE CURRENT
DIFFICULTIES THE HOLY SEE
FACES IN IMPROVING ITS RELATIONS WITH THE ORTHODOX WORLD.
THE POPE, AS MAJ
EMPHASIZES, WANTS RECONCILIATION WITH THE ORTHODOX, BUT NOT
"AT ANY COST."
ANY RAPPROCHEMENT HAS TO BE BASED ON "MUTUAL RESPECT AND
CONSIDERATION."
FROM THE HOLY SEE'S PERSPECTIVE, THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
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NICHOLSON

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